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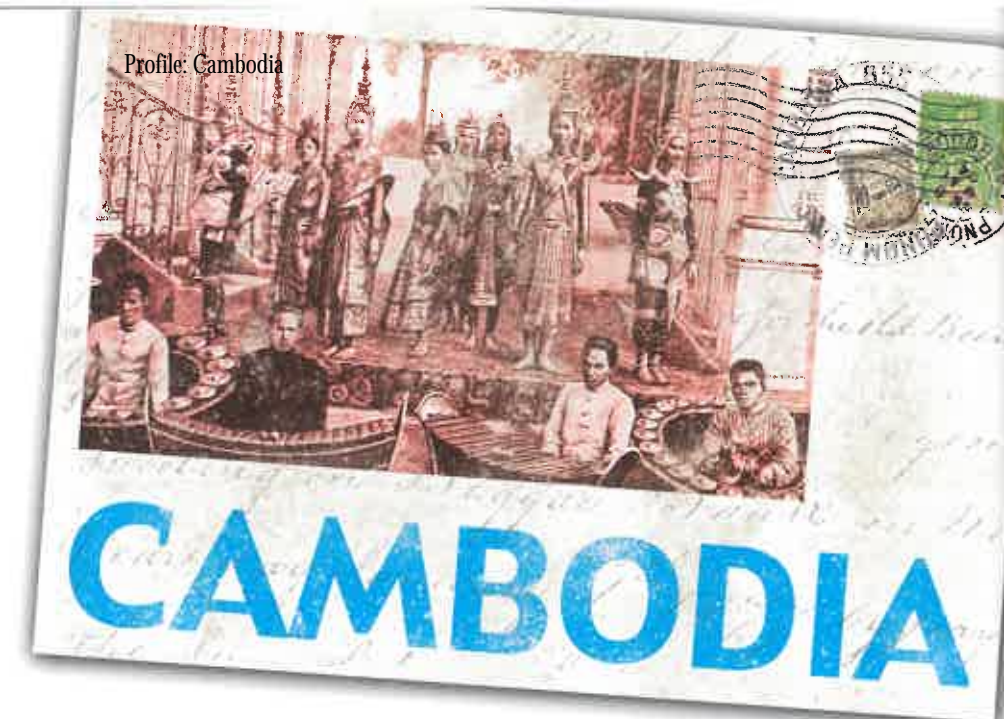
Considered one of the most heavily mine-affected countries in the world, Cambodia has endured a harsh history of warfare. The country's turmoil dates back to World War II, when UXO was strewn across the country. As one war ended, another was soon to come, and subsequently landmines were emplaced throughout Cambodia, increasing civilian casualties by the thousands. The French-Indochina Wars hit Cambodia during the 1950s and were followed by the South Vietnamese invasion from 1970 through 1975, when 539,129 tons of bombs were emplaced over Cambodia. These weapons still pose a threat to Cambodians today.

Landmines were laid by the North Vietnamese army in 1967 at the start of the Vietnam War. They were placed along the border between Cambodia and Vietnam to prevent outsiders from gaining access to Vietnam's war supplies. Though the country had hoped for U.S. aid during the Vietnam War, Cambodia instead suffered from millions more landmines and bombs left behind by U.S. troops. On March 18, 1970, the national assembly overthrew the monarchy and elected General Lon Nol as the leader of the new Khmer Republic. The Khmer Rouge held power from 1975 to 1979, which resulted in a civil war between General Lon Nol backed by the United States and the Pol Pot-led Khmer Rouge forces. Both sides relied heavily on landmines for defense. As the country was covered with deadly hidden explosives, Cambodia became what was known as a "prison without walls."

According to the Cambodian Mine Action Centre (CMAC), "throughout the three decades of mine-laying in Cambodia, it was standard practice to lay much denser minefields than necessary, and to lay them not only in battlegrounds but among civilian communities."¹ When Vietnam finally withdrew its forces, it seemed as if peace were in Cambodia's near future. The U.N. Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) was chosen to run the country for 18 months and oversee the elections for a central government. Despite this ruling, the Khmer Rouge continued fighting and laying more landmines throughout the 1990s. The new central government slowly gained international recognition and internal warfare in Cambodia officially subsided by 1999.

Landmine/UXO Casualties

According to the 2004 *Landmine Monitor Report*, 4,320 casualties were reported in 1996, 2,577 of them military and 1,743 civilians. As the growth of mine action in Cambodia increased rapidly, the number of casualties plummeted. In 2004, 671 casualties were reported; however, only 26 of those were military while the other 645 were civilians. Starting in 2000, the low rate of two casualties a day remained constant for three



years, but in 2004 the rate increased to almost three casualties a day. The cause of the recent increase in casualties is unknown; however, it is thought that one of the main reasons is "rising prices of scrap metal and the easy availability of cheap but effective Vietnamese-made metal detectors."²

CMAC is Established

Although it is unknown how many landmines are actually planted in Cambodia, CMAC estimates four to six million landmines are in the soil, covering over 2,900 square kilometers (1,119.70 square miles) of the land. In 1992, over 600 landmine victims were either maimed or killed each month in Cambodia; at this time, UNTAC saw the need to establish an organization that would help to rid the country of the day-to-day tragedy of its landmine contamination. CMAC was then created in order to "clear land for resettlement of internally displaced persons (IDPs), agriculture, community development and reconstruction of the national infrastructure."¹ CMAC began as a small group of local deminers as well as some international mine experts. With a focus on humanitarian mine action, CMAC concentrated on four main areas—mine awareness, minefield information, mine and UXO clearance, and mine clearance training. By 1998, CMAC had grown into a group of over 3,000 deminers and experts. Due to the support of the Royal Government of Cambodia and a large donor community, CMAC was able to flourish at the forefront of mine action. As one of the first mine action programs to be implemented successfully, CMAC paved the way for other mine action programs worldwide. At its beginning, CMAC's ultimate goal was to reduce the number of Cambodian landmine casualties. By the year 2000, casualties numbered 60 per month rather than the devastating 600 per month in 1992—an astonishing 90-per-cent decrease. In 1997, with the help of CMAC,

the Royal Government of Cambodia broke ground internationally with its signature of the Ottawa Convention—a mandate for the total ban of AP landmines worldwide, which was ratified by the United Nations.

Creation of CMAA. By 2000, CMAC seemed to be carrying a heavy burden: covering all the bases of mine action for the country. At the time, the Cambodian government decided to form another mine action group that could take over some of the responsibilities of CMAC—the Cambodian Mine Action Authority (CMAA). CMAA took over the tasks of national planning, coordinating and monitoring. CMAA is also responsible for licensing mine action operators, backing the elimination of stockpiles, monitoring usage and reporting of landmines, as well as collecting and organizing a national mine action database. As CMAA is still establishing its roles in cooperation with CMAC, CMAC continues to put into action its same core objectives.

Demining and MDD Program. CMAC's demining unit was at its peak in 1999 with 67 humanitarian demining platoons and three contract-development demining platoons spread throughout the country. With the loss of financial support, however, there was also a reduction in equipment and supplies. Currently, CMAC has 48 platoons and 18 UXO teams spread throughout the country. Deminers use two different types of platoons—normal and mobile. While normal platoons have a staff of 30 each and are used to clear large minefields, mobile platoons each have a staff of 33 deminers and are used to clear smaller-sized minefields.

Another groundbreaking strategy utilized by CMAC is the mine detection dog (MDD) program. The program began in 1998 and seeks to locate and detect minefields. In recent years, MDDs has been far more efficient than manual demining using metal detectors. MDDs in Cambodia would not be as successful as it has

been if it were not for the addition of bush cutters in March 2000. The government of Japan donated the bush cutters and over the years has donated a total of 12. The bush cutters have successfully sped up the process of manual demining as well as demining with MDDs.

Mine Awareness. Since 1993, CMAC has incorporated mine awareness into its main objectives. Initially, the awareness activities were targeted at those who had recently returned to the country and were unknowingly living in highly UXO-contaminated areas. The CMAC Mine Awareness Teams (MATs) work toward educating the community in how to avoid mine/UXO accidents, what to do when an item of UXO is encountered, and how to report mines/UXO to an official. MATs also gather information from local community members. The Community-Based Mine Risk Reduction (CMBMRR) project began in 2001 and was backed by the United Nations Children's Fund, Handicap International (HI), the Mines Advisory Group (MAG), World Vision International and World Education. Implemented through mine action activities, victim assistance programs and community development responses, the CMBMRR project works to determine how mines and items of UXO are affecting individual communities. The project also works closely with community members to develop strategies to cope with these issues and reduce the risk of casualties.

CMAC's Challenges

As one of the founding organizations in mine action and thus not having guidelines or models to follow, CMAC has encountered some hurdles along the way. As its accomplishments increased in the late 1990s, CMAC's donors and funding from the Cambodian government became vital to

its success. Until 1998, CMAC had received around \$12 million (U.S.) per year from donors, and each donor was required to maintain a similar level for the following five years.

According to Ieng Mouly, chairman of the Governing Council of CMAC, "in 1999, the organization was plagued by constant mismanagement."³ As the mismanagement of the organization became more prevalent, donor funding diminished, making immediate reform essential. Financial support from external donors decreased in 2000 to only \$6,298,000, with an additional \$700,000 from the Royal Government. At one point in 2001, three-quarters of the demining efforts were discontinued in Cambodia and a large portion of the staff was laid off due to lack of funds.

CMAC quickly drew up a reform contract that would lead donors to resume their support. The reform strategy consisted of three main goals:

1. Change where necessary and appropriate in order to increase the overall transparency, efficiency, effectiveness and productivity in humanitarian mine action.
2. Retain the many positive elements of CMAC that had been developed in the past.
3. Emphasize CMAC's core values of safety, cost effectiveness, honesty and integrity, appropriate technology, and expertise.²

While the reform of CMAC has helped to regain some financial support, it is still a long way from achieving complete reform due to its financial struggles. The common criticism of CMAC is that it is simply too expansive and that it is impossible to achieve success in all areas of mine action. However, with the addition of CMAA, CMAC is slowly taking on fewer responsibilities, allowing the organization to be more successful in mine action in a more centralized and focused manner.

Helpful Associations

Two other charitable organizations have greatly contributed to the improvement of mine action in Cambodia—HALO Trust and MAG. HALO Trust is a non-political non-governmental organization based in Britain that has cleared over 1,600,000 mines in nine countries since 1991. Specializing in mine clearance, HALO Trust has over 5,000 deminers in central and southeast Asia as well as parts of Africa and the Balkans. In Cambodia, HALO Trust has over 1,000 staff members who make up 16 mine clearance teams working in Banteay Meanchey, Oddar Meanchey, Preah Vihear, Siem Reap and Battambang provinces. With the assistance of mechanical vegetation cutters and mechanical excavators, HALO Trust has helped rid villages throughout Cambodia of thousands of landmines.

MAG Cambodia has worked toward developing a number of different programs relating to mine action. Also founded in 1992, MAG Cambodia's mission is "to end the human suffering and reduce the socio-economic impact of landmines and UXO on vulnerable communities in Cambodia." Over the last 13 years, MAG has developed three different types of teams: mine action, explosive ordnance disposal and community liaison. In recent years, MAG also added the training, monitoring and evaluation unit, which provides technical as well as educational training in mine action. MAG can boast being the first organization to recruit female and amputee deminers to join its teams, beginning in 1996. It currently reports that 20 percent of its employees are women and 20 percent are amputees, helping to destroy the mines that once attempted to destroy them.

Conclusion

As one of the most heavily mine-infested countries in the world, Cambodia has fought a hard battle against the threat posed by landmines. With the help of CMAC and coordination of CMAA, HALO Trust and MAG, along with the assistance of a number of other demining organizations, landmines continue to be removed and mine awareness implemented throughout Cambodia. As funding for mine action organizations fluctuates, mine action strategies are being continually reformed to adjust to the current landmine situation. Despite economic obstacles, all mine action organizations in Cambodia are working together to achieve their ultimate goal of a land safe from the threat of mines. ♦

See "References and Endnotes" on page 106

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